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Susanne W. Whitcomb

David B. Whitcomb

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Equity And Collaboration: The Move From Women's Issues Toward Gender Issues In Higher Education

Susanne W. Whitcomb and David B. Whitcomb

What are the current gender issues?

Does recent research provide direction for transcending male-female differences in higher education?

Are there promising processes for surmounting concerns?

In academia as in many other organizations, a diffused frustration periodically congeals and rises to the surface, to be expressed as "There *must* be better ways to work together — ways in which our human talents are acknowledged and used more comprehensively, and ways in which both organizational and personal goals are realized." Women and minorities in higher education have experienced this frustration more sharply and more often and have been challenging traditions and practices; their issues are legitimate and have long needed addressing. However, what sometimes happens in lifting them to consciousness is a polarization of opinion, a trivialization of issues as "only pertaining to women," and adversarial stances which block understanding, communication, attitude change, and action. It is not enough to open doors, for admittance to a warped organization may mean only that a greater variety of humans will be punished or injured by that organization's responses.

Women's Issues in Retrospect

Astin and Snyder (1982) looked at changes in higher education over the last ten years of affirmative action and noted both areas of progress and areas of frustration. The numbers of women in higher education did increase, and the salary discrepancies were somewhat lessened. However, data prepared for *Academe* (1982) show that inequities are still the rule rather than the exception. Astin and Snyder declared that there was no improvement and perhaps a loss in rank advancement for women. Further, when men and women were compared as to how their academic roles were differentiated, women spent a disproportionate amount of time teaching and men doing research.

The AAC report on the *Project on the Status and Education of Women* made four statements about the status of women in higher education:

- 1) Women are underrepresented in major policy-making positions in colleges and universities.
- 2) Women administrators are clustered in low-and middle-level positions and/or those which reinforce stereotypes about women's skills in counseling and service related areas.
- 3) Few minority women are administrators.
- 4) Women administrators are paid less than men administrators.

Additionally, a study by Marla Beth Isaacs (1981) shows persistent devaluation of women's work by men. In the experiment, identical papers or art works were judged, some with women's names as authors or creators and some with men's names. Work with women's names was judged consistently as inferior unless the woman was shown to have high status, such as a degree. This problem grows into the circular dilemma of needing status to have one's work judged equitably but being unable to get fair evaluations that would lead eventually to the necessary status.

Barriers to Equity

A persistent barrier to women in higher education is the lack of support from male administrators and faculty, according to the report of Cornell University Juxta Project, 1982. This report also pointed out that the Carnegie Commission noted barriers created by women wary

of the political label "feminist." To add to these roadblocks, benign neglect of Title IX and affirmative action enforcement often throw the action initiative to local campuses, which have traditionally not been supportive of these issues.

The Cornell project report noted that the usual approach was to develop separate programs for and about women, an approach which often "posited a model for institutional change based on confrontation politics and coercion, with women as the primary change agents." This approach usually does not work, for it touches only half the problem and ignores the fact that both sexes can be restricted by societal pressures rather than being free to develop according to individual interest and talent.

The Cornell project also indicated that women change agents with little or no power in the institution have been unable to have an impact on it in any significant way. "Long-term change depends on the cooperation and support of those who do hold power; in academia, this means men."

In interviews at Cornell as the project proposal was initiated, it was found that perhaps the "separatist, confrontation approach may also have *increased* resistance to change, creating new barriers which focus on institutional politics rather than on the fundamental issues of sexism and educational equity." Other barriers are cutbacks in federal aid to programs, limited financial support, and difficulty in identifying those persons doing research related to gender issues.

The Cornell project report also noted that there appeared to be significant changes in student values and goals that relate to changing roles, and other studies have borne out these reports of change in perception by young people. Curry and Hock (1981) found that cultural changes in the roles of females are having an impact on ideals of early adolescent girls as they define their ideal male and ideal female. White, Crino, and DeSanctis (1981) studied future male managers in business and found that sex role stereotypes may be breaking down. In earlier experiments subjects were told that there would be an influx of women into a certain high status profession. This led to assumptions on their part and a change in attitude toward the "high status" profession, devaluing it as less prestigious or desirable. The replication studies (White, Crino, DeSanctis, 1981) showed that

when the new group of young future managers were told that there was an increase in the participation of women in high status professions, those professions continued to be ranked high.

Behavioral and perceptual differences have also been acknowledged as barriers that slow down communication processes and the development of good working relationships. The collegial relationship has long been an important aspect of university life and also an area where acceptance of women as peers and friends has been slow. Banikiotes, Neimeyer, and Lepowsky (1981) studied gender and sex-role orientation effects on friendship choice. They reported that both sexes use the same strategy—looking for similarities—when choosing friends of the same sex, and that females use the same strategy in choosing male friends. However, males generally do not look for similarities in choosing female friends. This difference in attitude and behavior should be taken into account as chairs struggle to build department teams that are enhancing to the collegial relationships of men and women faculty members.

The interviews at Cornell found all persons acknowledging that changes in the roles of women affected their personal and professional lives in profound ways. All were interested in learning more about the nature of these changes, but "the politically conservative were wary of information from politically-related feminist sources; and since most...current research about gender issues has been rooted in women's studies or feminist programs, this blocks out most sources."

A study by Brehony and Geller (1981) deals with psychological androgyny, social conformity, and perceived locus of control. Stereotypical females conformed significantly more often than androgynous females and stereotypical males. Androgynous females were least influenced and reliably more internal in locus of control than either stereotypical females or even androgynous males. These authors found more individuals questioning traditional sex roles stereotypes.

Another difference between males and females that undoubtedly affects the internal working of the university is brought out in Carol Gilligan's studies (1982). She has found two modes of moral reasoning, with males oriented toward justice and rights and females oriented toward care and response. These modes are associated with different forms of self definition and reflect different images of relationships.

Images of hierarchy and power appear from the males' self-definitions and seem to derive from experiences of inequality. Images of networking relationships appear in the females' self-definitions and seem to derive from experiences of interdependence. These experiences give rise to the differing ideals of justice for males and care for females. The male acceptance that autonomy is of higher value than interdependence and the assumption that differing views are less valid are ideas in need of further exploration in the field of higher education today.

Differences between the stances of men and women administrators affect the perceptions of faculty. Johnson (1981) examined faculty perceptions of administrators' roles and success. He found that younger administrators were seen by faculty as more successful than those over 50; females more successful than males; singles more successful than married persons. His hypothesis that the perception of success by faculty is related to the amount of time spent on departmental affairs. Possibly, faculty also attribute more nourishing and caring stances to females, further adding to their judgments of success in administration.

The nurturant processes that women seem to use in their early careers change in later life stages, as pointed out in a study by McGee and Wills (1982). Neugarten and associates concluded that older men are more receptive to their affiliative, nurturant prompting, and older women to their aggressive and egocentric impulses. Lowenthal, *et al.* found that later life is more stressful for women and earlier life stages more stressful for men. These differences in stages of life also affect the work of the academy as well as the sense of well-being of those involved in these life stages. Van Meter and Agronow (1982) looked at the stress of multiple roles and recommended eliminating some roles or reducing role content as possible means of coping with role overload. The inclusion of significant others in role awareness, value clarification, and goal setting may help alleviate stress.

Progress Toward Equity and Collaboration

Orlofsky and Stake (1981) reported that within-sex differences in achievement and interpersonal strivings, self-perceived competen-

cies, and self-concepts far outweighed between-sex differences. Gender accounted for little of the variance on the dependent measures. Despite popular stereotypes that males are concerned with work and achievement and females are concerned with affiliation, the study found few sex differences. This was surprising, for the sexes are subject to differing societal norms and expectations that influence the roles they occupy and the evaluations and reinforcements they receive from others. These expectations may influence the kind of concerns they experience, the types of behavioral skills they are encouraged to develop, and the feedback they receive for exhibiting stereotypically masculine and feminine behaviors. However, this study suggests that gender differences (at least in the achievement and interpersonal domain) are relatively minor and are not sufficient to justify continuing the differentiation of the sexes in social roles, responsibilities, and privileges.

There have been other studies suggesting the commonalities of males and females rather than the differences. In a study by De Riemer, Quarles and Temple (1982) male and female academicians have about the same tendency to attempt a salary negotiation both for beginning salaries and for salary increases. Females were as successful as males in negotiating initial salaries and more successful in negotiating increases. Both sexes agreed on their perceptions of the academic reward system. However, females also reported feelings of pay inequality when they compared themselves to their peers, particularly male peers.

Despite the reports of similarities, there is sensitivity on the part of both men and women to the expectations of others regarding stereotypical roles. The sense among some women that they are "far out" in their views if they are looking for changes in roles and the sense among some men that they are "far behind" society's new expectations of women, became evident in a study by Galla (1981). In this experiment, female investigators elicited more non-traditional responses to the questionnaire from both male and female subjects than did male researchers. Galla's conclusion was that when women believe their responses will be known by male researchers they may moderate their responses toward more traditional sex-role attitudes. When men believe that their response will be known by female researchers, they

moderate their more traditional sex role responses to reflect less traditional attitudes. Social expectations of gender role responses can influence a person's attitudinal response. This should be considered when academic teams are formed and assigned problem solving tasks.

The Next Step

Assertiveness and aggression were necessary to force many organizations to see inequities and to begin to change. Because of the history of exclusion, injury, and neglect, however, many persons feel that to move from addressing "women's issues" to addressing "gender issues" or to "collaboration" is a sell-out. It would be an abandonment of the effort to secure equity and justice that is not yet complete and a devaluation of the years of struggle by dedicated persons who great personal sacrifices to raise unpopular issues and press for redress and institutional change. Change has come slowly, at the expense of an enormous investment of energy and personal resources.

The critical next step is a giant one — a decision to move the entire organization to a new level; to unite the protagonists and to collaboratively work for greater involvement, opportunities, and rewards. It would entail a move from the necessity for external pressure and legalistic monitoring for compliance to enlightened acceptance of valid issues, self initiation of change, and self discipline and continuous evaluation by organizations themselves.

Logically and strategically, the move from "women's issues" to "gender issues" is a transcending, unifying one. Men and women of the academy can be enabled to look at ways the organization blocks or facilitates full use of their talents and abilities. All newly hired faculty could profit from mentoring about the use of the "new system," how to identify and develop career ladders and how to gain access to resources for enhancing teaching and research skills.

If men and women are to develop the kind of collegial relationships that exemplify acceptance and equality within the university, then a great deal more understanding of each other becomes necessary. Indvik and Fitzpatrick (1982) state that only accurate communication of thoughts, opinions, and feelings on significant issues will allow persons to know each other well enough to assess change in each other

and their relationships. Understanding is the basis from which colleagues may hope to formulate "the elegant strategies" necessary to deal with their differences. Schilb (1982) makes the point that an understanding of women and their issues by men can sometimes be facilitated if men take on the hard work of persuading other men to pay attention to these issues. He suggests that eventually the more practical maneuver might be to assist male teachers to integrate women's studies content into the courses they already teach. If this is done in addition to the courses presented in Women's Studies, it greatly hastens the awareness throughout the university of those critical issues that have been traditionally devalued or avoided.

In the Cornell study (1982) both sides of the polarized faculty agreed "that it would be valuable to understand the changes as realities of long-term social movements, with politics as only one dimension; and if work and family roles for both men and women actually are changing in lasting ways, then higher education needs to acknowledge the reality of these changes, *beyond politics*, and adapt institutional policies and practices to meet the real needs of students as they face the new challenges. These adaptations need to be holistic, systemic, involving institutional management, student life, the academic curriculum, faculty-student relationships, and the entire *learning environment*, which scholars such as M. Elizabeth Tidball suggests exerts a comprehensive socializing influence on all students."

Based on the Cornell-Juxta Project strategies, the following steps seem to form a viable plan of action.

- 1) Hold interviews to explore issues and contribute toward identifying specific alternative solutions.
- 2) Develop an organization development strategy.
- 3) Set up dialogue among faculty, administrative and student leaders in positions to influence institutional change.
- 4) Link these leaders with systemic concerns and directions of change across the academic world.
- 5) Identify existing resources.
- 6) Search the literature.
- 7) Expand the dialogue throughout the campus.
- 8) Endorse certain readings and disseminate them.
- 9) Identify priority targets for action.

Conclusion

Continuing to utilize the same strategies for change over a long period is an ineffective use of time and energy. The momentum gained from the women's movement and from the affirmative action legislation of ten years ago has slowed. Rather than ride it to oblivion, it is time to change tactics and to transcend the polarization that has often accompanied confrontation. There is no need for any person or group to lose ground; the university has much to gain from the full use of talents of men and women and from an equitable reward system. The differences between the sexes are not serious barriers to collaboration or the building of strong department teams. The barriers are insurmountable only when persons or groups have refused to acknowledge and address them. In order to move toward this new level of organizational development institutional commitment must be shown at high levels, and data gathering processes employed which ensure wide involvement and consensus on issues, priorities, and plans of action.

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